

Behavioral Interviewing

Advanced Section: Step #7

Interview Candidates

Interview Candidates

Set a relaxed atmosphere



Interviews are intended to obtain the most accurate information possible about the capabilities and experience of the applicant. The use of behavioral questions will require the applicant to think hard about specific situations and actions to respond appropriately. Candidates do this best in a relaxed setting. Greet them warmly. Use a brief ice-breaker such as a brief exchange about the hot weather, or the cold weather. You might ask how long they have lived in the area, or what they like about the area they are living in.

Interview Candidates

Set a relaxed atmosphere

Use an interview setting that is less formal . . . a table and chairs rather than the desk in a formal office.

Notetaking will be very important during the interview, so be certain to have the table, or some writing surface for use in notetaking. If more than one interviewer is involved, be sure everyone has plenty of room for their notetaking. It is best to arrange the chairs so that the applicant is not able to look at the notes being taken.

Interview Candidates

Set a relaxed atmosphere

These interviews usually take over an hour. Offer the applicant something to drink, like coffee or a soft drink. A large mug of an iced drink or coffee can help you be comfortable and relaxed during the interview also. Have tissue and cough drops available in case you or the applicant have need of them.

Interview Candidates

Briefly describe the job



Your description of the job is a nice transition from the ice breaker to the actual interview. It should include pertinent information about the primary functions of the job, and any special challenges the job may pose. This portion of the interview provides an opportunity to establish the expectations and parameters for your new employee. Although only one of the applicants will be selected, it is important to remember that one of the applicants probably will be filling the position...so talk to each of them as if they will be filling the position.

The primary functions of the position you will discuss should be those from which your job analysis grew. Briefly describe the functions, without revealing the way you want the functions performed, or the knowledge or experience necessary to perform the function. For example, you might state that the job involves receptionist duties such as answering the telephone and greeting visitors. Do not state that a pleasant phone voice and a bright smile are essential because they will be performing receptionist duties. Your interview will reveal what duties they have performed, and how well they performed them.

Interview Candidates

Briefly describe the job

Most jobs have some special requirements. Perhaps peak workloads don't permit vacations during certain times, perhaps shift work is required, or perhaps rotation of assignments is required. Whatever those requirements might be, discuss them during this introduction portion of the job interview. Many candidates will already have done sufficient research on the job in preparation for the interview so that they should not be totally surprised by these requirements, but spelling them out can ensure no surprises the first day on the job. Some interviewers prefer holding this portion of the interview until the end, lest an applicant try to modify answers based on information given about the job. If proper analysis of the job has been done, and good behavioral questions are used, this should not be a problem.

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Interview Candidates

Discuss any special requirements of the position



Special requirements such as weekend work, extensive travel, evening shifts, or split shifts may influence the willingness of the candidate to take the position. Now is a good time to discuss those requirements. Some positions involve peak workloads at specific times of the year. Discuss those requirements, and the impact they may have on granting of leave. Any other special requirements should also be discussed. Paint a realistic view of the requirements of the job. Don't sugar coat those requirements. Hiring an applicant that becomes unhappy or leaves shortly after being hired is counterproductive.

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Conduct Interviews

Briefly describe the job

Don't be afraid to point out any realistic promotion opportunities that the position may afford, but don't make promises of promotion. You can't keep them, and they will likely come back to haunt you. While you are interviewing the candidate, you are also "selling" the candidate. Managers say that they "select" the candidate they want. Actually the "selection" is an "offer" of the job. The candidate can refuse that offer. Therefore it is important that the description of the job not be just a perfunctory one.

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Conduct Interviews

Ask Prepared Questions



Begin by telling the applicant that you expect them to answer the questions with specific examples. Tell them that you realize that they will need time to think before they answer, therefore you expect there will be silences. Encourage those silences. Explain that you will be using those silences to finish the notes you are taking on the previous question. If you do have an applicant that responds quickly, you may have to "create" silences by taking time before asking your next question so that you can finish making your notes. These notes will be very important when you make your selection, so be prepared to take good notes.

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Follow the list of questions developed for the interview, but don't be afraid to follow up on additional questions that might occur naturally as a result of the response from an applicant. You can make a note of those additional questions and answers so that you have a complete record of your interview. Follow-up questions can be very important as they can provide additional detail needed to obtain a very clear understanding of the applicant's qualifications.

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This type interview requires the applicant to really THINK about their responses...so don't be afraid of silence. It means they are thinking. Use that time to write notes on the applicant's previous response. When the applicant is having difficulty thinking of a specific instance, assure them that you have the time to wait once or twice. If they are still unable to provide an answer to the question, you can go on to the next question, but be sure to come back to the skipped question before the end of the interview. The information you gain from the applicant's answer may be essential in your decision to select or not select.

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Keep the applicant on track with their answers. Because most interviewers accept generalizations and speculation for answers, many applicants will begin providing such generalized answers. Stop them, insist that they provide an answer that specifically tells you about a specific incident or event. At first you might be hesitant to insist on such specificity. However, remember that your failure to obtain specific information about this applicant's past behavior in a specific area means that you have eliminated that question from consideration with regard to that applicant. Is that information not important? If not, eliminate the question for all applicants. If it is important, insist on specificity.

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Are you getting a purely positive or purely negative view of this applicant? If so, you may have planned questions which are not designed to provide you with a balanced view of the applicant. If, for example, you are getting the impression that a candidate does not follow established policy or procedure, you need to ask "Tell me about a time when you were pressured to violate company policy and did not." This type question can assist you in developing a truly balanced view of the applicant. Looking for contrary evidence is important as seldom is anyone totally negative, or totally positive.



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Encourage the applicant as they are responding by nodding your head, smiling when appropriate, and making eye contact when they are talking. Show them you are listening. This encouragement can help the applicant relax, think more clearly, and provide you with the information you need to make your selection. An applicant that is too tense to think clearly and thus has a poor interview may be cheating YOU out of the opportunity to obtain the services of an otherwise outstanding person. Interviews are threatening enough for most people, they get nervous enough without adding any undue pressure, so help them help you by helping them to relax and enjoy the experience.

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During the interview you may notice that the applicant appears to be getting tired. You have asked them a lot of questions, required them to think about a lot of different situations, and respond to a variety of questions. Don't be surprised if you see little body movements that indicate fatigue. Instead use those signs to offer encouragement such as "We are just about finished, only ____ more questions to go." or "I know these interviews are long, but at least you only have to go through one of them (with a smile)."

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Conduct Interviews

Close the Interview




A good closing question is "Is there anything I have failed to ask that you think I need to know to make a decision favorable to you?" After they have responded, thank them for coming for the interview.

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When closing the interview, some interviewers opt to read the notes they have written by each question. This technique allows applicants an opportunity to add any important information they may have forgotten, demonstrates that the interviewer really did listen and understand the responses, and further demonstrates the interviewer's commitment to providing a fair and unbiased interview.

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Finally, inform the candidate if you have additional interviews, approximately when you hope to have a selection made, and that HRMS will be in contact with them to inform them whether they were selected or not.

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